

# WASHED ASHORE

KERR THOMSON



SCHOLASTIC INC. • NEW YORK

Copyright © 2017 by Kerr Thomson

All rights reserved. Published by Chicken House, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, CHICKEN HOUSE, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

First published in the United Kingdom in 2015 as *The Sound of Whales* by Chicken House, 2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-0-545-90420-9

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

17 18 19 20 21

Printed in the U.S.A 23

First edition, June 2017

Book design by Christopher Stengel

CHAPTER  
ONE

Walls of black water rose on either side of the boat as it dropped through a crack in the sea. In the wheelhouse, Fraser Dunbar clung to an old wooden chart table and waited for those walls to collapse and send him to the bottom.

The windows rattled and the wind roared through the open doorway. The door banged hard on its hinges. He couldn't close it from where he stood, dared not move in case he slipped straight through the opening and out into the night.

Ben McCaig glanced at him from behind the wheel.

"How are you doing?" he shouted above the wind.

"Fine," Fraser lied. He had never been out at sea in a storm before. It was thrilling to begin with, but now it was just scary. No one in their right mind would go out in this kind of sea, in this kind of weather, yet Ben was whooping as if it was a fairground ride.

"Are you going to be sick again?" he yelled.

Fraser shook his head. "There's nothing left to puke."

Ben laughed and spun the wheel.

“My dad’s going to kill me,” Fraser shouted.

“Not if this storm kills you first!”

It was a definite possibility and only now did Fraser remember his father’s fierce words that very afternoon: “You must not, under any circumstances, get on that boat again. McCaig is downright reckless and that boat should have been scrapped.”

He’d ignored that advice, had told himself that he was fourteen and didn’t take orders from anyone, not even his dad. Now it was both annoying and astonishing that perhaps his father knew best after all. As the boat plunged deeper into the dark sea, and his stomach turned to mush, he suddenly remembered the list his dad had taken great pleasure in sharing: the top five reasons why people drowned.

Number 5: *water sports accident*. That didn’t apply.

Number 4: *alcohol consumption*. Good, he hadn’t touched a drop.

Number 3: *inability to swim*. No problem, he could swim just fine.

Number 2: *failure to wear life preserver*. Fraser looked behind him at the ancient life jackets hanging on the wheelhouse wall. He could grab one if needed, but if Ben wasn’t wearing a life jacket, then neither was he.

Number 1: *water conditions exceed swimming ability*. He swallowed hard as he looked out at the ferocious ocean. He wasn’t *that* good a swimmer. Nobody was.

The walls of water were closing in; the little boat was about to be swallowed whole. Fraser let out a cry and hoped that Ben hadn't heard. Then at the last moment the boat rose, grabbing an edge of the swell and riding it slowly, casually almost, out of the watery canyon. Despite its peeling paint and shabby deck, an old island lobster boat like this was built for these wild seas off the northwest of Scotland.

Maybe they were not about to sink after all, Fraser thought. It had seemed certain for a moment there.

With one hand still on the wheel and his legs splayed for balance, Ben reached behind him and grabbed the banging door, pushing it shut and securing the catch. Fraser wiped a hand across his face, tasting salty water.

Ben patted the wheel. "This old piece of junk might just get us home." He peered through the window. "The harbor's around here somewhere."

The slow swish of a solitary wiper was fighting to keep the wheelhouse window clear. Fraser could see no sign of the lights of Skulavaig.

And then he remembered why they were here in the first place, sailing so late at night. "Where are the whales?"

Ben rubbed his stubbly chin. "They will have dived to deeper water . . . I hope. It'll be a bit daft if we miss the harbor and hit a whale." The grin was gone; there was no more whooping. Whales were Ben's life.

It was already a bit daft, Fraser thought, to go sailing into the night with clouds building and the wind picking

up, but being with Dr. Ben McCaig, professor of marine biology at Aberdeen University, was beyond cool. He'd even given Fraser a job title for the summer: seasonal voluntary assistant researcher, which really meant "general grunt," but that was OK. It was enough that Ben let him come along and it was something to do over the summer holidays. The island of Nin was not the most exciting of places at the best of times, and these were not the best of times on his little island.

Ben pulled back on the throttle, and the throb of the engine died, the boat pitching hard. "I can't see a thing," he said. "I'll have to step outside to see where we are."

He lunged out of the door and Fraser staggered after him, with a glance at the unused life jackets. They stood with their backs against the wheelhouse and were pummeled by the wind and rain. The sea was a dark, heaving mass, broken only by the white flash of a breaking wave. It was impossible to tell where the water ended and the land began, but they could see the tops of the cliffs, black against the gray tumbling clouds.

With growing panic, Fraser scanned the coastline, working along from the cliffs to get his bearings. Twice he wiped eyes that stung from the spray. As his eyes refocused, he saw a dot of light farther up the coast. It was too far out to be on land.

"Another boat," Fraser said to Ben, but when he looked again, he couldn't find the light.